

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO: AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

A Synopsis by

MARGARET TOWNSEND SCULLY

“ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO,” or “Staunch were Their Hearts,” is an historical sketch written for the 1845 Fire Centennial commemoration exercises by Margaret Townsend Scully, member of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, and Madge Miller of the Pittsburgh Drama League. It is a play in two acts, with a prologue by Henry King Siebeneck, presented on April 10, 1945, at Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall, under the auspices of the Pittsburgh Drama League, Mrs. Elmer D. Harshbarger, general chairman and Madge Miller, co-director.

While most of the characters, and the events around which the action takes place are authentic, it should be understood that the writers have exercised a certain amount of dramatic license.

The theme throughout both prologue and play is the commemoration of the courage and vision of the Pittsburghers of 1845, who, undaunted by their individual losses and the devastation of the great fire, set to work immediately to rebuild and modernize their city.

PROLOGUE

“I am William Pitt the Elder, ‘name father’ of Pittsburgh. During my lifetime, I served as head of the British government, instituting a military policy of unusual vigor and shrewdness. My armies and navies won many victories—at Louisburg, Niagara, and Quebec. But far and away the most significant of all was General John Forbes’ capture of Fort Duquesne.

“General Forbes, in my honor, named this place ‘Pitts-burgh,’ and thus I became your ‘Father Pitt.’ Forbes besought me to take this community under my special protection, and I did as he desired, not only during my life, but for all times thereafter. To you, my children, Pitts-

burghers of every century, I bequeathed a legacy more precious than fine gold. That legacy was the spirit of energy.

"And you have received that legacy and put it to use in the way I intended. Nowhere else in the world is the force of energy more manifest than here in Pittsburgh. One hundred years ago it built anew this city after a great conflagration had destroyed thousands of dwellings, shops, and factories. It proved itself then as dynamic as the spirit which today animates you in this world crisis.

"Yes, my descendants of 1845, I commend your ancestors of that day in particular, and refer you to them for closer study. They were not disheartened by the calamity of April tenth. They went to work valiantly to rebuild what the flames had destroyed. And they built better than they knew, for they instilled in their children the determination to overcome all difficulties, whatever they might be, with the help of God.

"Now I shall turn back the wheel of Time, to recreate the past before your eyes. I shall show you the people from whom you have sprung — the rebuilders of Pittsburgh — the stout-hearted men and women of 'One Hundred Years Ago.'"

ACT I

The play opens in the studio of the French dancing master Monsieur Aristide Bonnaffon. It is Thursday, April 10, 1845. Monsieur Bonnaffon is directing a dress rehearsal for a benefit for New England flood sufferers to be held that night. Music is playing and a group of young people are being drilled in a popular new dance called the polka, just imported from London. Among the dancers are Mary Phillips, Oliveretta Graham, Oliveretta's cousin, William Graham Johnston, and young George Singer, Jr.

To the right are the musicians, with a piano, a harp, and several flutes and violins.

To the left is seated a group of parents and friends of the performers. They talk among themselves, discussing subjects explanatory of the plot — the unusual weather, the long dry spell, and the high winds. Among those present are Mr. and Mrs. Josiah King; Judge and Mrs. William Wilkins; John A. Roebeling, the bridge builder, and his wife; Rees Cadwalader Townsend, wire manufacturer, and his wife; Dr. Andrew

N. McDowell, father-in-law of Stephen Foster, and his wife; Mr. and Mrs. William B. Foster, Stephen's parents; Major William Croghan, owner of the beautiful house and estate called "Picnic"; Dr. and Mrs. James Ramsay Speer; Mr. and Mrs. James R. Snowden; Mr. and Mrs. William Blair; Dr. Jonas Roup McClintock, thrice mayor of Pittsburgh, and his wife; George Anshutz, the ironmaster, and his wife; Mr. and Mrs. William Bissell; Walter Forward, lately Secretary of the Treasury; Mr. and Mrs. Richard Biddle; Harmar Denny, former Congressman, and his wife; James Crossan, genial owner of the Monongahela House, and his wife; John H. Shoenberger, iron and nail manufacturer, and his wife; Dr. and Mrs. William J. Ward; David Blythe and William Coventry Wall, artists; Mr. and Mrs. Samuel R. Johnston; James K. Moorhead, soon to become president of the Monongahela Navigation Company, and his wife; and General William Robinson, Jr., said to have been the first white child born west of the Allegheny River, and his wife.

The polka is repeated, with increasing applause from the spectators.

Mrs. Edgar, pretty choir leader, now enters. She is very vivacious and is welcomed effusively by Monsier Bonnaffon and the performers.

Monsieur Bonnaffon begins to call the roll for the next feature, the minuet. Young ladies: Virginia Crossan, Annie Ogden, Mary O'Hara Denny, Ellie Bissell, Lib McKnight, Susan Pentland, Annie Robinson, Jane McDowell. Young gentlemen: William Irwin, Thomas Mellon, George Evans, Jim Denny, Algernon Bell, Jim O'Hara, William Thaw, James Hutchison.

As Jane McDowell and Annie Robinson have not yet arrived, Monsi^eur Bonnaffon declares he cannot begin without them, and calls upon Mrs. Edgar to rehearse her choral numbers. She is assembling the singers when Stephen Foster enters with four companions. Foster, a good looking young man with modest manner, explains that they have just dropped in to watch the rehearsal. He introduces the four young men as fellow "Knights of the S. T. [Square Table]," a popular secret society: Andrew L. Robinson, Robert P. McDowell, Charles B. Scully, and Richard Cowan.

Some pleasant banter follows and several requests are made for some of Foster's songs. Foster hesitates, but is prevailed upon and the four "Knights" take their places with him around the piano to the right of

the stage. Foster sings "Old Uncle Ned" and "Old Dog Tray," while Robinson, McDowell, Scully, and Cowan accompany him in the choruses. "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" is called for enthusiastically. Foster again sings with great feeling. Jane McDowell, the "Jeanie" of the romantic ballad, has arrived in the meantime, and shows embarrassment during Foster's singing. She is engaged to him at the time, and eventually becomes his wife.¹

Foster expresses his thanks for the generous applause, and begs that the rehearsal go on. A mixed choir under Mrs. Edgar's direction now sings a group of the favorite songs of the day: "The Old Oaken Bucket," "Annie Laurie," "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes," and "Flow Gently Sweet Afton."

Foster expresses great approval: "I congratulate you, Mrs. Edgar! Your choir will be an outstanding success tonight!"

Monsieur Bonnaffon also exclaims: "*Sans doute!* (Without doubt!) The songs are pleasing and well rendered."

Mrs. Edgar, highly pleased by such praise, remarks that they have not yet seen Monsieur Bonnaffon's minuet, and begs the dancing master to regale Foster and the "Knights" with an exhibition of this graceful dance. The spectators applaud enthusiastically and express enjoyment of both music and dancing.

At this moment the sound of a fire bell is heard in the distance. The spectators comment upon it, and then dismiss it as unimportant. The minuet is resumed with some slight corrections by Monsieur Bonnaffon. Into this care-free scene now comes a note of sudden tragedy. Old Tim, an Irish fruit vendor, who peddles his oranges through the streets, bursts into the studio, and pushes his way through the dancers.

Tim shouts in a panic of excitement that a terrible fire is raging down at the Point! "First t'was only a shed on fire on Ferry Street! But she's spreadin' now, fast, to warehouses and homes!"

The music stops . . . consternation prevails.

Stephen Foster, the four "Knights," and a number of the younger

¹ Considerable dramatic license has been taken here, for with the possible exception of "Old Uncle Ned," none of the songs here rendered are known to have been written before that time, and all had yet to be published. "Jeanie," at least, was written several years after Stephen's marriage to Jane McDowell in 1850, in connection with their reconciliation after a separation.—Ed.

men who are volunteer firemen run out, exclaiming that they will be needed.

James Tucker Shannon, a volunteer fireman, rushes in. He is wearing the helmet and uniform of the Niagara Fire Company. "All firemen to their posts!" he calls. "Mr. Mellon, Mr. Thaw, any others? Bonnaffon, clear this building at once! A wall of flame is crossing the city in front of a heavy wind. Your studio lies directly in its path. It cannot be saved! Friends, go to your homes! Bonnaffon, I leave you in charge!"

Shannon runs out. A woman screams and sobs. All mill about. Bonnaffon keeps his head. He calls his wife from another room. Between them they guide everyone to the street door.

The sound of fire bells, voices calling, general clamor outside increases.

Bonnaffon is almost overcome by the prospect of losing the work of a lifetime. He passes his hand affectionately over a corner of the piano, then quickly gathers up some music, and hurries out.²

INTERMISSION

Between the acts two newsboys go up and down the aisles selling papers and calling head lines:

"Gazette and Advertiser! Daily Morning Post! Awful conflagration! Most dreadful calamity! Pittsburgh in ruins! Two-thirds of city wiped out! Wood Street a sea of fire from the Monongahela River to Diamond Alley! Fire still raging with awful sublimity at seven o'clock! Gas works destroyed! Monongahela Bridge prostrated in river! District of Kensington well-nigh annihilated! Bank of Pittsburgh consumed! Mayor's office destroyed! Post Office, Market House, and Third Presbyterian Church among few buildings saved! High wind and lack of water contributing factors! Untold numbers homeless. Universal horror and dread! Gazette and Advertiser! Daily Morning Post! Gazette and Advertiser! Daily Morning Post!"

ACT II

Time, one month after the fire.

A meeting of the Relief Committee for Fire Sufferers is being held

² Pittsburgh has always had an enviable reputation for its generous response to other cities in time of emergency or distress. It was therefore an ironical twist of fate that surprised this particular group in the midst of their effort to provide help for a community of New England flood sufferers.

in the grounds of the old Market House, one of the few buildings not destroyed.

Five committee officers are sitting at a long table in the center of the stage: Mayor William J. Howard; George Whitten Jackson, president of the select council and chairman of relief committee; Thomas Bakewell, member of the select council; John Davitt, city treasurer; Henry Baldwin Earle, treasurer of the relief committee. The committee is studying reports and memoranda.

People are passing through the grounds. Duquesne Grays sentries pace back and forth, and give the meeting a semblance of privacy.

City Treasurer Davitt is reading aloud a report of individual losses: African M. E. Church, \$3,000; Thomas Burrell, physician, \$4,000; T. J. Gallagher, student of medicine, \$50; Christian Ihmsen, glass manufacturer, partially insured, \$17,000; Mrs. Joep, sempstress, \$81; Johnson and Stockton, book sellers, partially insured, \$8,500; James Woods, cotton factory, six houses, \$18,000." He lays the report down and observes: "Perhaps the losses can never be accurately totaled, but it would be safe to estimate them at a minimum of fifteen millions of dollars."

Mr. Bakewell: "A staggering amount!"

Mayor Howard: "What are the total contributions for relief made to you thus far as treasurer of the relief committee, Mr. Earle?"

Mr. Earle: "\$199,566.65 to date. It is being distributed now to applicants for relief according to this system of classification." (He hands out copies to the members.)

Mr. Jackson: "Of the 1,011 applicants, what percentage were those in very moderate circumstances?"

Mr. Earle: "Those of the first class, I should say, comprising amounts not exceeding one hundred dollars. If you gentlemen will turn with me to the statistics on Page 2 . . ."

A mannishly dressed young woman passes by, takes a pencil and notebook out of her handbag. A spectator remarks to another: "That's Mrs. Jane Grey Swisshelm, editor of the *Pittsburg Saturday Visiter*."³

Second Spectator: "Editor? Of a newspaper? A woman?"

³ Here again the clock is momentarily turned ahead a little, for Mrs. Swisshelm, though already a contributor to local newspapers, did not start her own, the *Saturday Visiter*, until late in 1847.—Ed.

Third Spectator: "A woman in business?"

First Spectator: "Let us hope that her advanced ideas may not turn the heads of any young girls of the community."

Second Spectator: "A woman's place is in the house!"

Monsieur and Madame Bonnaffon pass by and join Mrs. Edgar and friends. There is much talk of the amazing progress of the rebuilding. A stranger just come to town remarks: "The stagecoach driver told us of the new bridge that is to replace the old wooden structure. Is it true that it is to be of a suspension type made of wire cable?" "Yes, it is the first scientifically designed and constructed bridge of its kind in the world! The great work has already been started by Mr. John Roebling."

At this point a nun, Sister Hilda Warde, the founder of Mt. Mercy Academy, leading a group of young girls, comes up the right aisle through the audience, and stands on the right of the stage.

A schoolmaster from the demolished Western University of Pennsylvania, leading a group of young men, comes up the left aisle through the audience, and stands on the left side of the stage.

The two groups of young people take notice of each other across the stage.

Schoolmaster: "The ruins of ancient Greece, young gentlemen, could surely not present a picture of more awful desolation—Ahem! Do I perceive that I have not your full attention in this matter? May I direct your gaze to what remains of a fine old church to your left?"

Sister Hilda Warde: "Young ladies! Eyes straight ahead!"

Schoolmaster: "Young gentlemen!" (clapping his hands) "Your attention, please! Follow me."

Mayor Howard, who has noticed the exchange of glances, addresses the schoolmaster: "Be not too severe with them, good friend. Despite our losses, we have much to be thankful for, and good cause to rejoice. None of us can doubt that the Pittsburgh these young people are to know will be far greater and more beautiful than our city that was."

A considerable crowd is assembling. Jane Swisshelm, with notebook in hand, approaches the mayor, and asks that he tell them something of the relief work that is going on.

Mayor Howard: "Mr. George W. Jackson, chairman of the relief

committee, is better qualified to answer that than I, Mrs. Swisshelm. I have asked him to prepare a statement for this committee, but you and these good citizens are as fully entitled as any official to hear his words."

Mr. Jackson: "Your Honor, when named chairman of the relief committee, I looked upon that task assigned me with something close to despair. One third of the city of Pittsburgh had been consumed by fire in less than six hours, two-thirds of the business capital smouldered; eleven hundred buildings were in ruins; and, most appalling, thousands of men, women, and children found themselves houseless and destitute. Age and youth, wealth and poverty, were alike its victims.

"Yet on all sides I found faith, and courage, and unbelievable generosity. If the victims of the catastrophe were houseless, they were not homeless or friendless; their more fortunate fellow citizens opened their doors to them, saying: 'You have lost everything; but, come, we will share with you.' The work of restoring children to their parents, of reuniting families, and of relaying the good news of the safety of loved ones was carried out promptly, with the aid of many selfless men and women. Food and clothing were pressed upon us by friends both in the vicinity and from great distances. Amounts of money, large and small, have come to us from sixteen of these United States, and from the countries of England, France, Denmark, and Scotland. Within this state, individuals and organizations—the churches in particular—are still giving with utmost generosity, in the wake of the check sent by the State of Pennsylvania for fifty thousand dollars.

"Your Honor, this is my statement: there is no despair in the hearts of these good people, nor in mine. There is life and health left, and mind, and the bold indomitable spirit of enterprise. With the help of God, we shall rebuild our city!"

Mayor Howard: "Your words are very gratifying, Mr. Jackson, and that same hope for the future animates, I know, the hearts of all of us. Our community is a young and lusty one; less than one hundred years have passed since John Forbes wrested Fort Duquesne from the French and Indians in the name of the British Crown. We are the descendants of those hardy men of Fort Pitt who, as Revolutionary soldiers, fought and died and hallowed this land with their blood that we might know freedom and the right to peaceful homes. Staunch were their hearts, and no less so must ours be.

"It is truly said: 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.' Our eyes must be upon tomorrow, and our steps must be firm. Homes, churches, shops, and factories will rise again! Together, with the help of Divine Providence, we shall make of this triangle of blackened ruins a golden triangle whose fame will endure as a priceless heritage for those who follow us." (Applause: shouts of "We're with you, Your Honor!" "We can do it!", etc.)

Old Tim: "You never knew an Irishman who'd let a fire down him! Did ye?" (Cheers: "That's right.")

Voice: "Nor an Englishman!"

Voice: "Nor a Scotchman!"

Voice: "Nor *anyone* living in Pittsburgh!" (Applause: "That's right!")

A young girl runs out from the crowd and addresses the mayor: "Oh, Your Honor, I see some fiddlers approaching! May we not have a dance here and now? A Virginia reel?"

The music starts up. They begin to clap, quickly form lines, and dance the Virginia reel. Applause at its conclusion. Shouts of "Now, 'Susanna'!" "Let's sing 'Oh! Susanna'!"⁴ "Lead us, Stephen!" Foster leads the singing and then all march off stage down the aisles through the auditorium, after the audience had joined with them in singing "The Star Spangled Banner."

⁴ "Oh! Susanna" was first published in 1848, but there is some evidence that it was written several years earlier.—*Ed.*

CAST

Characters	Impersonators
William Pitt.....	JOHN DEWITT BEATTIE
Monsieur Aristide Bonnaffon.....	BURTON MUSTIN
Stephen Foster.....	EMERICK SIMBOLI
Mrs. Edgar, Singing Teacher.....	MRS. EDWARD S. LAWRENCE
Old Tim, Fruit Vendor.....	JOHN DEWITT BEATTIE
James Tucker Shannon, Fireman.....	ROBIN M. INGRAM
Madame Bonnaffon.....	MRS. RICHARD S. LARGE
George Whitten Jackson, Chairman Relief Committee.....	CHARLES A. LOCKE
Mayor William J. Howard.....	HOWARD EULENSTEIN
Thomas Bakewell, Member Relief Committee.....	FERDINAND FILLION
Harry B. Earle, Treasurer Relief Committee.....	DAN T. R. DICKSON
Jane Swishhelm.....	HESTER INGRAM
Annie Robinson.....	GEORGINA GRAY
City Treasurer.....	WILLIAM L. DONEY

THE POLKA

George Singer, Jr.....	HUNTER BROOKS
William Graham Johnston.....	THOMAS T. RHODES
Mary Phillips.....	PATRICIA PITCAIRN
Oliveretta Graham.....	MARTHA SNOWDEN

and

Girls—ANNE T. BROOKS, BARBARA BROOKS, MARYLEE ELLIS, CATHERINE ENGELDER, ELEANORE LARGE, LOUISE LYNDON, SALLY LYDDON, MARION McCARGO, PATRICIA O'BRIEN, LUCINDA PITCAIRN, EVELYN SLICK, FRANCES WALTON.

Boys—FRANKLIN B. ALLISON, JAMES L. BOERINGER, DONALD BROWN, EDWARD FELLOWS, SAMUEL M. JACKSON III, NICOLAS KOTULA, CHARLES MANWILLER, JR., WILLIAM G. McMOIL, J. VICK O'BRIEN, JR., HENRY O'BRIEN, JR., DOUGLAS G. PRATT, CHARLES R. ROBB.

KNIGHTS OF THE S. T. (A secret society)

Andrew Robinson.....	JOHN CUDDYRE
Robert McDowell.....	HOWARD W. GINDELE
Charles B. Scully.....	FREDERICK BULLARD, JR.
Richard Cowan.....	NICHOLAS KEHAYAS

CHOIR

MRS. JOHN BIDDLE, MRS. JEANNETTE CARTER BRAUTIGAN, KITTY BURNS, EDWARD COUCH, MRS. DAN T. R. DICKSON, ALMA FURLICK, AUDREY GAPE, MRS. H. REA GARBER, GEORGINA GRAY, DR. ANNA E. JAMIESON, MRS. JOSEPH KENNY, CARL LLOYD, MARCELLA LUTTON, KATHERINE LUTTON, ANN McCABE, HETTIE McCONAUGHY, MRS. DONALD McNEIL, ANNIE R. SWAN, RICHARD VOGLER, MRS. WALTER S. WRIGHT.

THE MINUET

SARA CLAUSER, EULAILA ECKSTEIN, OLIVE MAE GRAY, GEORGINA GRAY,
EDITH HARDTMAYER, EMILY JACOBS, CAROLYN LAPPE, NANCY A. NOAH,
MARCIA OLDS, MARY IDA RICE, PATRICIA RICE, ANNIE SWAN, SALLY
WRIGHT, GRACE ZISCHKAU II.

Music under the direction of.....DR. HARVEY B. GAUL

Pianist.....MISS KATHRYN WICK

Tower Trio.....

MRS. ELWOOD S. TOWER

MRS. JOHN PHILLIPS STEVENSON

MRS. ALBERT MACDONALD

Dance Director.....KARL HEINRICH

Costumes.....

MRS. DONALD MCNEIL

ANNIE SWAN

CAROLYN LAPPE

Properties—Sound Effects.....MRS. HERBERT ZISCHKAU

Make Up.....

MRS. EDWARD S. LAWRENCE

JOHN D. BEATTIE

Coiffures.....JERRY FEDELE

Stage Manager.....HESTER INGRAM

Floral Decorations.....BUREAU OF CITY PARKS

USHERS

Head Usher, JANET WOLFE: LUCIA BUCHANAN, MARY CHAMBERS, PATTY
GILLESPIE, DAPHNE FIRTH, LAURA HAYES, EMILY HERON, BARBARA LEECH,
MARJORIE LEECH, FARLEY WALTON, MARY WURTS.